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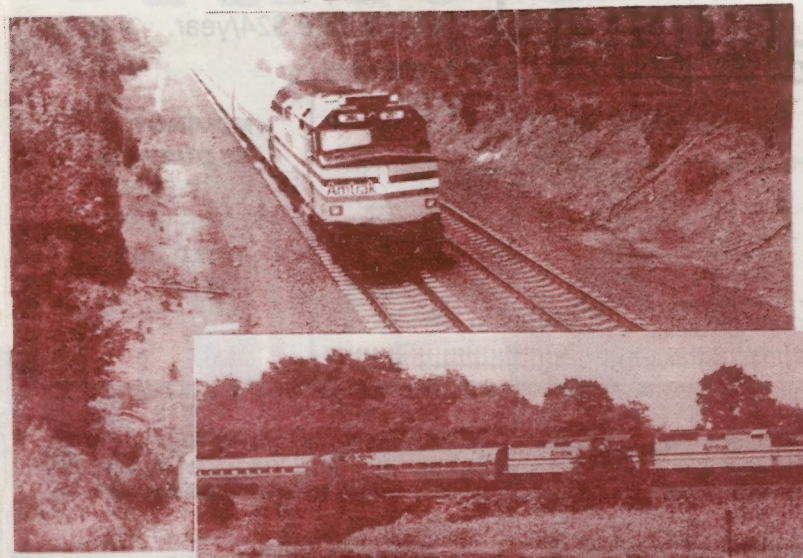

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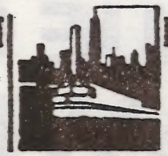

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RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

PRICE $1.25
ISSUE NO. 559
DECEMBER 21, 1996

Holiday Issue

ON THE COVER

Santa Claus and the crew of the Eastern Shore Railroad's Santa Claus train prepare to depart Cape Charles VA for Parksley VA on December 2, 1995.

(Rear cover:) Santa visits with local children at Cheriton VA on the fourth annual Santa Claus train operated by the Delmarva Chapter NRHS and the Eastern Shore Railroad on December 2, 1995.

Both photos by Jack M. Turner. In this issue, author Turner tells about this train and other excursion runs on the Delmarva Peninsula.

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We have changed the system for setting the dates of RTN issues. This issue is the Dec 21 issue, which is the date that we expect it to arrive at subscribers' mail boxes. Our former method of dating the issues at approximately the time they went to press made them appear less current than other publications, which date their issues ahead. The actual cutoff date of news that appears in this issue will be found elsewhere in these pages.

EAST COAST REPORT

The New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Museum Commission and the United Railroad Historical Society, in cooperation with NJ Transit, operated steam excursions between Hoboken NJ and Port Jervis NY over the last three weekends in October. The locomotive used for these excursions was ex-C&O No. 614, which is now owned by Iron Horse Enterprises. The engineer on the huge 4-8-4 for most of these trips was well-known excursion promoter Ross Rowland, who is the chairman of Iron Horse Enterprises. The trips were run to benefit the ongoing restoration of historic equipment destined for display at the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Heritage Center.

On the first two trips over the weekend of Oct 12-13, the 614 hauled a 23-car train composed of 14 NJ Transit commuter coaches, seven private cars, which were the first-class cars, one tool car and an ex-Norfolk Southern diesel generator car to provice head-end power for the train.

These were the first mainline steam excursions in the Northeast since the NRHS convention in 1988. During that convention, ex-Nickel Plate Berkshire No. 765 powered several excursions over former Reading RR lines, and one trip between Hoboken and Port Jervis on this line on June 30, 1988, which was the last steam excursion over this line.

Shown here is the "Iron Horse Ramble" on Sunday, Oct 13 en route to Port Jervis westbound on the former Erie main, passing through Rutherford NJ. Photo and text by Alex Mayes. (See also RTN 557.)

●●●

NJ Transit's board of directors endorsed, by voice vote Nov 26 the 53-mile rail transit corridor linking Glassboro, Camden and Trenton. The same vote also designated the initial segment to be Camden-Trenton.

This first segment would cost $314 million and be covered by diesel-powered light rail vehicles, apparently akin to Siemens' RegioSprinter or other European designs for light- and medium-density rail lines. The line is expected to carry up to 16,900 riders a day.

"I will support the motion today," said board member John McGoldrick, "but I have some misgivings. I want a system that makes economic sense." McGoldrick also took time to note the perceived poor performance of NJT's only existing South Jersey rail line, the Philadelphia-Atlantic City route.

About 150 people packed the board meeting room at NJT headquarters in Newark. Forty-five of them spoke, including residents of Burlington County, municipal officials, two state assemblywomen, Burlington County officials and some members of the Gloucester County-based and curiously named Citizens for Alternate Rail.

The anti-rail people put forth questionable figures on costs and ridership, and repeated that the line would forever lose money. Several of them introduced themselves as "taxpayers." Yet several municipal officials from Burlington County, plus a county freeholder, State Assemblywoman Diane Allen, and Carol Ann Thomas of the county engineers' office, spoke in favor of the rail line, saying it will be a much-needed economic boost to the towns along Burlington County's waterfront on the Delaware River. Some social-service workers said the line would provide much-needed transportation for senior citizens, handicapped persons and job-seekers.

Patti Graham of Citizens for Alternate Rail (CFAR) said of the NJT decision, "I think it's a disgrace. I think the fact that you had a county that the freeholder

board openly opposed the line, I think it's unconscionable." She added that she was "just sickened" by the vote. The freeholder board that "openly opposed" the line, in Gloucester County, did so after pressure from CFAR to reverse its earlier resolution of support.

CFAR so named itself because it advocated a new rail line along freeway median strips in Gloucester County. This option has been rejected by NJT. Another CFAR member, Christy Davis, recently told reporters that enhanced bus service, along the roads their ideal rail line would follow, would help solve Gloucester County's transportation needs.

NJT officials also alluded to enhanced bus service for Gloucester County, mainly as a stopgap until rail service is developed.

As part of the rail planning process, five Burlington county towns are set to host meetings to discuss the project, during December.

NJ Transit also approved acquisition of 190 minibuses for the Atlantic City Jitney Association, over three years. NJT will lease the vehicles to the jitney association, a group of owner-operators of small buses that provide frequent transit service in Atlantic City, at no cost to the association for four years. In return, the jitney association will provide shuttle services between the Atlantic City rail terminal and the city's 13 hotel-casinos and other locations. Presently these bus shuttles are operated by NJT itself, and are factored as an expense to the Atlantic City rail line. Turning the shuttle over to the jitneys will save half the cost of the present bus shuttle, and will improve the rail line's financial performance. NJT will reimburse the jitney association one dollar for each passenger carried to or from the rail station (present jitney fare is $1.25). Some 448,000 commuters annually use the NJT rail terminal bus shuttles.

Rail service was badly disrupted by two mishaps in the days preceding Thanksgiving, between Newark and NY. The first mishap was the derailment of Amtrak train 12, the **Fast Mail**, as it crossed a movable bridge over the Hackensack River near the west portal of the Hudson River tunnels (see report last issue).

The cause was determined to be a misaligned rail that actually rested atop the rail it was supposed to fit against after the bridge closed. The train was traveling at 60mph, the bridge speed limit, when it derailed. Two AEM7 units and the first four cars left the tracks and came to rest on the embankment, with the lead unit settling in the spongy ground of the surrounding wetlands.

Amtrak and NJT hastily organized bus shuttles between Newark and NY. Trains were delayed, some for hours, and several were annulled. Many passengers were directed to the PATH railway between Newark and NY via Jersey City. Service delays lingered until Nov 27.

Another mishap occurred as an Amtrak employee was struck and killed by a Metroliner at 6:15am The worker was involved in the Secaucus Transfer project a mile east of the Saturday derailment. Four trains were delayed up to an hour as investigators went to the scene.

Despite the two accidents, Amtrak provided extra service for a one-week period over the Thanksgiving holiday. Six trains each way between NY and Washington were added, dubbed **Pilgrims Express.** Amtrak issued special schedule folders and borrowed cars from SEPTA, NJ Transit and MARC. —James Thornton.

Following the derailment Nov 23 of Amtrak train 12, all train traffic on the busy 2-track line between Newark & NY was halted. NJ Transit, which runs electric MU or push-pull electric locomotive service on the NEC and North Jersey Coast Line, easily "turned" trains at Newark. MidTown Direct service between Dover and NY became "Hoboken Direct" for the next two days.

Amtrak terminated northbd trains at Newark, and the engines had to be uncoupled and run around the trains. Amtrak used equipment from Sunnyside yards for makeup trains from NY to Boston. At around 11am, makeup train 12 arrived New Haven with Springfield passengers making an across-the-platform change to a Shore Line East trainset.

Later, Passenger Extra 929 arrived and received an F40 on each end and left as train 56, the **Vermonter.** Boston passengers transferred to a Shore Line East trainset and it left as PX 6698, making any necessary stops. This equipment made it back to New Haven at 9:15pm.

At 6pm WNBC Newschannel 4 had an excellent story that gave all the travel alternatives. NJT trains terminating at Newark had all passengers directed to take PATH to NY. PATH service was increased to meet the demand. Amtrak riders also used PATH or buses.

WABC ch 7 NY also had good coverage on their 11:00 newscast, and even reported that PATH was honoring Amtrak and NJT "passes".

Channel 30 WVIT in Hartford has a "trash copy" news format, and at one time ran a promo for their "News at 11" saying that an Amtrak train derailed on a bridge and then "collided" with another train.

On Nov 27, only four days after train 12's derailment, Amtrak Metroliner 101 struck and killed an Amtrak track worker just east of the derailment site, where a huge transfer station is being built. Train 101 was carrying 31 passengers and was held at the site nearly 2hrs for the coroner and an accident investigation. This caused massive delays to Amtrak and NJT for the morning rush, as only one track was open for train traffic. —Bob Underwood.

●●●

A series of recent robberies on the Washington Metro has struck fear into some passengers and provided scary newspaper headlines and articles. The Red Line is the affected leg of the system. A poll reported in the Washington Times Nov 24 had 50% of respondents saying that Metro is "somewhat safe", while 35% found it "very safe". Only 4% answered "very unsafe", while 11% chose "somewhat unsafe" and 1% were unsure. After two armed robberies on the heavily used Red Line within about 10 days in mid-Nov, Metro officials said they were adding transit police to trains and were warning passengers to be more alert. One thing most queried passengers agreed on was that they feel safer on the trains than walking in the surrounding community.

Conrail has set Dec 23 for a shareholders' meeting to decide whether to merge with CSX. The latter now owns almost 20% of Conrail stock, and the meeting will be to decide whether to let CSX buy more. Pennsylvania corporate law presently prohibits CSX from acquiring over 20%. Norfolk Southern said it is lobbying large Conrail shareholders to reject the bid. In late November two legal decisions rejected NS bids to block the Conrail-CSX merger.

Advertising for customers to ride its trains to the Macy's 70th Anniversary Thanksgiving Day Parade, Metro-North ran photos of cartoon characters in early parades in out-of-state newspapers, giving directions for reaching the parade by M-N and the S shuttle from Grand Central to Times Square. Family fares were also mentioned.

Dallas Prepares For Trinity Express

By Mike Blaszak

Under a crystal blue sky and with a parade proceeding down Irving Boulevard (for Santa Claus), DART offered up its own holiday gift for the citizens of Dallas on the afternoon on Dec. 7: one rebuilt RDC for the impending startup of the Trinity Express Railway commuter service. This long-awaited commuter rail operation will begin on Dec 30, linking Dallas Union Station with a stop at Medical Market Center and a temporary terminus at the new bus-rail station in Irving where the unveiling ceremony took place. (This is an open-air shelter reminiscent, to some extent, of the canopy at the new Oakland station.) Blue, white and silver RDC 2001, an ex-VIA unit outshopped by AMF in Montreal, wore a large red gift bow on its roof for the occasion, which also included free candy canes given to curious onlookers who trooped through the car's interior; and TV interviews of DART officials, including Lonnie Blaydes, now president of DART's commuter rail service.

Free rides will be offered for three weeks, and then DART will begin charging a one-way fare of $1 for the 16-minute, 10-mile run, except for patrons with a current DART monthly pass. Ticket machines have been installed at the stations.

Rail tickets are good on buses, and bus transfers are honored on the train. No schedule is available for the service yet, but trains will operate only during peak periods on weekdays (6-9 a.m. and 4-7 p.m.) A variety of connecting DART bus routes feed the trains at Irving. If you need to travel between Dallas and Irving when the trains aren't running, you can use the 203 express bus, but it inexplicably costs $2 per one-way trip.

The route used by the trains is the former Rock Island main line between Dallas and Fort Worth which those two cities bought in the early 1980s. The Katy obtained local service freight rights over the line (now it's UP), while BN retained trackage rights on it. Although the track sees moderate freight use and was in pretty good shape, DART spent a substantial sum upgrading it for passenger service.

The Trinity Express should be extended to the ex-T&P office building/station in Fort Worth by 1999, and a new track is planned to be constructed into Dallas/Fort Worth Airport by 2005 or so. DART has bought 13 RDCs for the service, and the second one (2007) is reportedly completed. Each car will seat 96 riders.

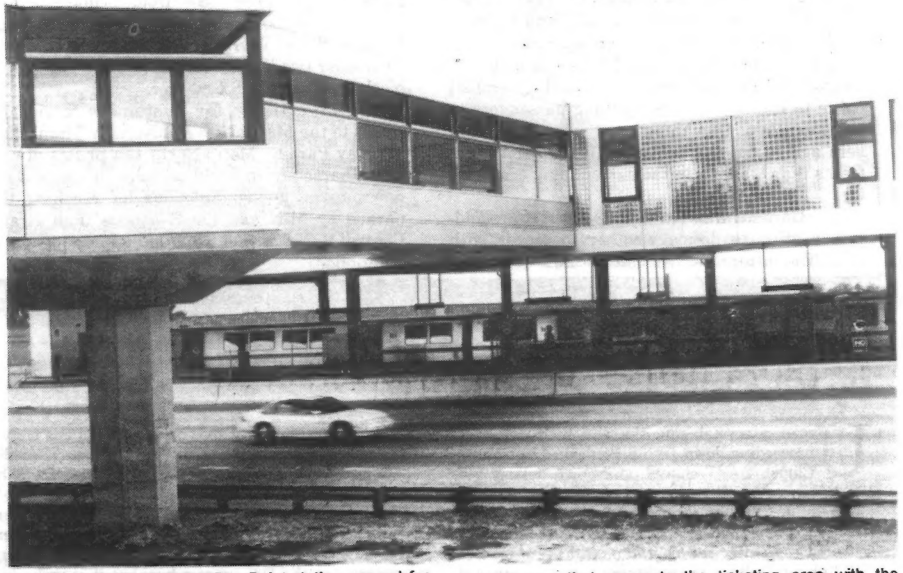
RAIL CANADA

VIA Rail became on Oct 15 the first railroad in the world and the first transportation company in Canada to offer reservations through the Internet. Bookings can be made by accessing VIA's web site www.viarail.ca where, VIA says, all the information you need for preparing your trip is available. But as of now only economy and VIA 1 class reservations can be made. Sleepers will become available, VIA said, when it introduces its new reservation system in spring of 1997. VIA said that about 4000 people weekly visit its web site.

VIA has begun a public relations campaign in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor aimed at the business market, trying to increase membership in its Préférence Program, causing business people to use the train more. The campaign includes a contest with rail tickets and other prizes as rewards for members of Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade using VIA. A large brochure for these targeted users has been prepared, titled "VIA, *The* Right Track".

VIA ridership through October (year to date) was up 0.6% for the Corridor, up 16.2% for Eastern transcon service, down 0.6% for Western transcon and up 1.6% for the system, including remote services. Total ridership systemwide for year to date was 3,059,024. For the month of October Corridor patronage was up 1.1%, Eastern transcon down 21%, Western transcon down 15% and systemwide ridership down 1.9%.

WEST COAST REPORT



(Above:) BART's Pittsburg-Bay Point station opened for revenue service Dec 7. This opening-day photo by RTN shows how the station straddles the eastbound side of the Highway 4 freeway with a pedestrian bridge concourse that connects the ticketing area with the platforms. One of the first revenue trains to use the station awaits departure for San Francisco and Colma. See RTN's account of the opening on the next page.

Passage of the Puget Sound Regional Transit Plan with a 58% yes vote is regarded as a stinging rebuke to the Puget Sound-area highway lobby and its bitterly anti-rail leader, Bellevue developer and mall owner Kemper Freeman Jr. The margin of approval for the $3.9 billion, 10-yr plan came as a surprise to nearly everyone after Seattle voters slaughtered a $50 million plan for a Seattle Commons park near downtown earlier in the year.

One question is whether Amtrak will soon move to a new Tacoma station on or near the pre-1954 Milwaukee Road/Tacoma & Eastern site near 24th & D Sts closer to the Tacoma dome and across from the now-building Pierce Transit center. Under this plan, RTA commuter trains and Amtrak trains would diverge from the BNSF main line near Reservation Tower just north of the present Tacoma Amtrak station. They would then join T&E tracks on a new interchange and climb a stiff grade past Freighthouse Square shopping center and the Tacoma Dome to their new stations, then continue up South Tacoma Hill and end up running parallel to I-5. The RTA trains would terminate at Lakewood, just south of Tacoma. Under a state plan, Amtrak would continue through Ft. Lewis and rejoin the BN main after descending a short grade at Nisqually. This would cut 10mins and a number of miles off the Amtrak run and get Amtrak trains out of Nelson Benett tunnel, now single-tracked for double-stacks, and a bottleneck. This original NP line had local psgr service until the late 1950s.

Despite solid ridership gains, there is new concern for the future of the Washington State rail program. Republicans took control of the State Senate in Nov, and the new chairman of its Transportation Committee is Representative Eugene Prince of Thornton, a small Eastern Washington town. Prince is a trucking company owner known to despite railroads. He has in the past opposed all forms of state involvement in railroads and has walked out of meetings in which state rail programs were discussed. Local rail advocates are hoping for help from pro-rail Republicans in the Senate and from Republican House Transportation Committee Chair Karen Schmidt of Bainbridge Island. She is a former Amtrak opponent who later became a strong state passenger rail program supporter, and reportedly dislikes Prince.

Things went smoothly on the two-section southbound **Cascadia** operation out of Seattle the day before Thanksgiving. Amtrak West used an operating pattern similar to that used on Seahawk home-game Sundays: the unusual 35-min separation between the two sections, plus carefully-done train announcements at Seattle and earlier-than-usual loading seemed to make for a smooth, orderly boarding process. The trains handled about 800 riders in Seattle and another 200 in Tacoma.

In an unexpected move, the Benton-Franklin County Commission, a major governing body in the Tri-Cities area of Washington (Pasco-Kennewick-Richland) recently wrote to the state DOT insisting that the state study a return of passenger train service to the just-reopened Stampede Pass line to Seattle.

BNSF officially reopened Stampede Pass Dec 7, when a train of grain empties ran from Auburn to Pasco, the first revenue train to use the pass since a bridge fire east of Wenatchee on the ex-GN main line over Stevens Pass forced a 3-week temporary reopening in 1985. BNSF says it will increase use of the pass as business requires, but plans to have as many as 10 trains daily running there by the end of 1997. There are now calls from both the Tri-Cities and from Yakima for a resumption of passenger service on the line. The Tri-Cities Commission seemed unaware of rumors that Amtrak may move the Seattle section of the **Empire Builder** back to the Stampede Pass line to take advantage of lower operating costs (with a Portland-section split farther west at Pasco) and of greater revenue potential. —Rocky Shay.

●●●

Biggest highway commuter mess in the Bay Area since the Oct 1989 earthquake happened Dec 12 when the BART system transbay service was completely shut down for most of the morning commute hours due to a power cable in the transbay tube shorting, tripping a circuit breaker at 4:25am, following shortly by a similar failure at the Embarcadero substation, that cut off power to the second tube track. BART got westbound service going at 10:30 and two-way service, though slower than usual, at 11:31am. Commuters from the Eastbay took to their cars, causing a 25-mile backup from Concord to San Francisco. Highway commutes were double and triple normal times. The evening commute was about as bad. AC Transit provided extra transbay buses, but not enough to help much. The Oakland-SF ferry had 1700 passengers, triple its normal load. BART said the outage cause probably was worn cable insulation.

On Nov 26 BART's central computer crashed repeatedly between 6:20am and 10am, disrupting service for thousands of commuters.

Altamont Express Commuter Rail Service is said to be on a political fast track, with a startup proposed for Jan 1998. Two morning and evening runs with four-car trains are planned, using UP right of way Stockton-Lathrop-Tracy-Livermore-Pleasanton-Fremont-Santa Clara-San Jose via the Altamont Pass of the old **California Zephyr**. A three-year trial run would be done initially.

The RegioSprinter began demonstration runs in Northern California Dec 9. A report comes next issue.

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BART PITTSBURG STATION OPENS

By Jim Russell

A new name appeared as the destination sign on the overhead monitors of Oakland's Rockridge BART station at 11:21am Dec 7, the day that almost five miles of new passenger rails were added to the nation's mileage. The monitor read "PTS - BAY POINT", and the 10-car train pulling in from the west would take your editor and other passengers to the celebration of opening revenue service at the just-completed terminal beyond the North Concord/Martinez station that opened Dec 16, 1995 (see RTN 538).

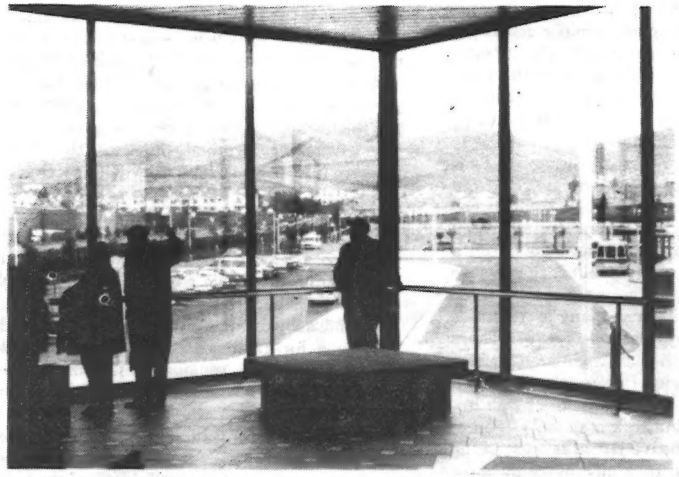
The train was one minute late on its new December schedule, and would arrive at Pittsburg also a minute late, but taking exactly the 33mins from Rockridge required by the timetable. It was a beautiful ride through the rolling hills and suburbs of Contra Costa County, the landscape having recently turned green under the stimulation of copious rain. The sky was filled with picturesque rain clouds, though no precip fell.

At Pittsburg we found a most interesting station structure, with busy freeway 4 running its eastbound lanes right under part of the building. There is a long, elevated walkway or concourse over the highway, taking one from the ticketing area to the train platforms. Since the latter are built in the freeway median, the concourse serves as a fascinating place to wait, isollated from the traffic noise on the platforms, where one can watch for train arrivals and can view the auto traffic below at close range. Benches and bay windows are provided for such viewing. One gets the feeling of being in a giant video game as cars flash by underneath at seemingly warp speed. (Locals say that traffic on Hwy 4 routinely does 85mph here, unless police are out ticketing them, which happened recently right at the station area.)

In construction of the station, Caltrans lowered the grade over Willow Pass here, making big cuts into the hills. The BART grade is still steep, but not more so than other grades on this line. The freeway was improved in the process, being widened to create the median, and the Bailey Road Interchange was rebuilt.

BART souvenir ticket design for Pittsburg opening.

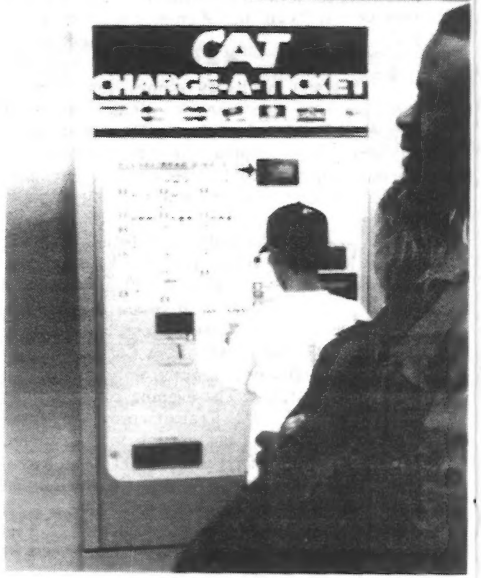
The station has a high-tech look, with much aluminum and glass. Its setting offers views of the Delta water and hills, in addition to the freeway. It's now BART's eastern-most station, giving service to Eastern Contra Costa Co. that was promised when BART was conceived, but not delivered until now, though its residents have been paying taxes for it all along. The next logical extension, in the vague future, would be to Antioch and Brentwood as BART increases its domain around the Greater Bay Area.

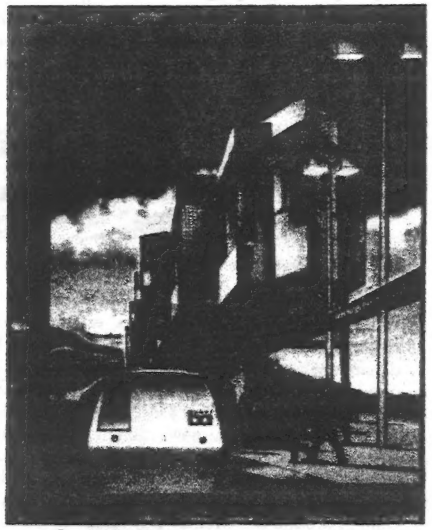


In the photos at the right (p. 9) are two more views of the concourse across the freeway. The concourse connects the ticketing area and the platforms. The interior view is the leftmost photo, and the other shows the bay-window effect of viewing areas along the concourse. BART photos.

In the photo above we are in the ticketing area of the new station, looking away from the freeway at the parking and bus area adjoining the station. Beyond that are housing developments and rolling green hills.

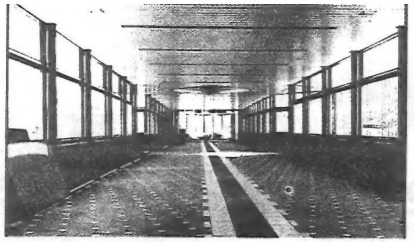
At the right is one of the new ticket machines at the station. It will accept credit cards, ATM cards or cash. These machines are found also at the other two recently-opened BART stations, Colma and North Concord, and at 15 of the other 34 BART stations. BART said the machines can issue tickets up to $60 in value, and can assist visually impaired riders with braille and voice directions. RTN photos.

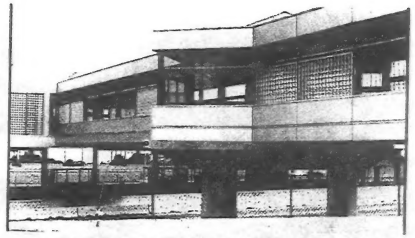




At left is BART's official poster for the station opening, done in rich reds, oranges and blues. Like other station posters, it has exaggerated perspectives and symbolic elements.

Of the station, BART said "Like a glass-brick bridge to the future, the new...station appears to float above the river of traffic on Highway 4. Three large pyramid-shaped sylights and acres of open grillwork and glass block give the $18 million station an airy, outdoor feel. Wide windows open the station to broad vistas of the Delta waters to the north and the soft rolling hills of Eastern Contra Costa County to the south. Passengers approach the station under a covered pedestrian walkway and ascend to an 180-foot-long bridge over Highway 4's eastbound traffic."





PERSONAL ACCOUNTS: THE 12 MONTHS OF TRAINING

By Theodore W. Scull

January: Penn Station. Begin the year with a flawless intermodal trip. Board 3:50pm one-stop Keystone to 30th Street, and by 5:15pm we are in an Avis rental car on the Schuylkill Expressway for a monthly weekend visit to my father.

February: Blizzard. A pre-Presidents' Weekend snowstorm wipes out a motor trip to the Adirondacks, so to salvage the long weekend, switch to a train to Asbury Park for Ocean Grove on the North Jersey Coast Line. Arriving without a booking, we find everyone else has canceled, offering the choice of any room in town.

March: New Orleans. Following a Mississippi River steamboat cruise, spend a delightful morning riding end to end on the St. Charles Avenue streetcar line with pleasing scents from the Garden District wafting through the open windows. Spot graffiti-covered SEPTA PCCs in the car barn, bought for spare parts rather than future service.

April: NYP-PHL. With continually rising Amtrak fares in the NEC, decide to give our business to the NJ Transit/SEPTA connection from New York to Philadelphia. The flawless switch at Trenton is from a 12-car Transit train to a two-car MU SEPTA local. Cost is $24 round trip vs Amtrak's (cheapest) at $72. With my wife, that's times two.

May: Shanghai-Suzhou, China. Hotel sends a runner to buy two hard class tickets to Suzhou but return must be bought at the other end. Following a peaceful ride, arrive Suzhou railway station, and with the aid of a commandeered Chinese guide, secure return reservations. Like the Japanese, Chinese line up at platform marks, but when train pulls in, it's a Darwinian survival of the fittest. Luckily, with NY subway training, we are swept aboard and find seats. Ride returns to a peaceful kingdom.

June: End of an era. With the passing of my father, 41 years of regular train trips home to Philadelphia from boarding school, college, graduate school and adopted home in New York come to an end.

July: Portuguese trams. Buy a day pass and ride the rebuilt trams but fewer routes than last year, then a day later, find that Oporto has only one remaining line.

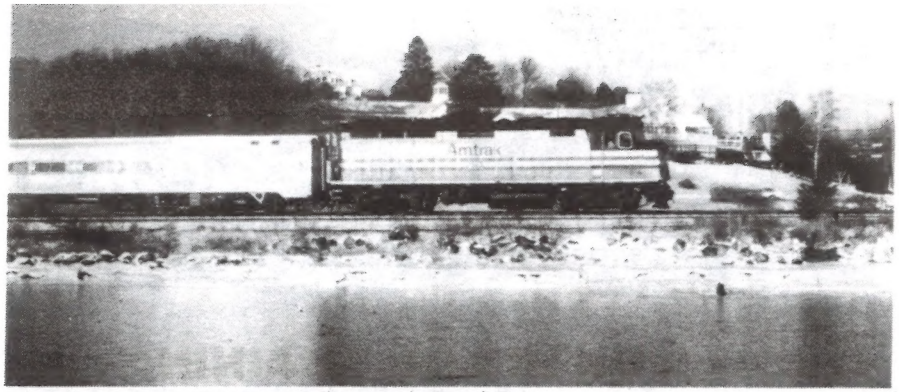
August: TGV. Aboard late 20th-century technology, race 168mph southeast from Paris to Le Creusot in Burgundy to connect to a 3-mph barge plying a late 18th Century canal. Intermodal travel of a contrasting sort.

September: Royal Scotsman. Join a Smithsonian railway tour as the study leader and spend six nights cruising the rails of Scotland and England. On the East Coast Main Line south of Berwick-upon-Tweed, an IC 225 streaks by, picks up loose ballast that smashes six of our windows. Disabled train goes empty to repair depot, and later during the night en route to York, another window is smashed.

October: All in a day - Strasbourg to Ascot. Occupy a compartment aboard Edelweiss at Strasbourg for a leisurely cross-country ride north via Luxembourg to Brussels Midi. Transfer to Eurostar, with only 12 passengers in first class, to London Waterloo and an immediate connection to a jam-packed SRO Saturday afternoon train to Ascot.

November: A first trip on Midtown Direct. Board a Dover train at Penn Station two days after the Amtrak derailment at Portal Bridge. Possible delays of 10-20 minutes posted. Takes 42mins to cover the five miles to the wreck site. On the return, from Summit, board an on-time Hoboken train as helpful conductor reports that the Midtown Direct is 50mins late.

December: A day's outing. Board a Metro-North train at Grand Central, enshrouded in construction canvas, and lead two dozen people from the 92nd Street Y on a day's hike along the Hudson. On the return to GCT, walk through the annual holiday model train exhibit in the Citicorp Building. Go home and dust off my Lionel PRR GG-1 and 3-car California Zephyr set, Christmas gifts from my father in 1950.



Amtrak F40 #291 leads NortheastDirect train 84 through Mystic CT on its way to Boston on a chilly Feb 7, 1996. Photo by Carl Miller.

NARP ISSUES WARNING ABOUT AMTRAK

The following is the text of a Dec 3 press release from NARP:

RAILROAD PASSENGERS WARN TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR AMTRAK. The National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) cautioned today that recent reductions proposed for Amtrak's already-skeletal long-distance passenger train network could lead to eventual elimination of that network. Intercity rail passenger service would survive only in the Northeast and perhaps a handful of other short-distance corridors.

NARP noted that, as work on the federal fiscal year 1998 budget begins, Amtrak's survival is at stake. Amtrak must be provided sufficient operating support to continue running its entire, existing network. Without a truly national system, neither Amtrak nor any other form of vital, national, intercity rail passenger services will survive. That would make the US the only advanced, industrialized country without meaningful national rail passenger service.

Amtrak has made significant progress in reducing its operating costs and improving its efficiency, but still faces severe financial pressures in its quest to reach Congressionally-imposed operational self-sufficiency by the year 2002. The failure of the last Congress to provide a stable source of capital funding and to legislate other needed changes vital to self-sufficiency is in part responsible for the present financial crisis facing Amtrak. NARP believes Amtrak cannot reach self-sufficiency by further reducing its limited network. Amtrak's attempt to improve its financial position by reducing services during 1995 instead appears to have aggravated the situation--the 1995 cuts are in part responsible for the crisis Amtrak now faces.

NARP believes the existing Amtrak intercity rail network falls significantly short of a truly national system, and decries the further reduction of that network as planned by Amtrak for May 10, 1997.

NARP calls on all Americans who believe this country needs an alternative to the continuing destructive effect and high cost of the automobile to write to President Clinton and to their elected representatives. Letters should call for additional funding sufficient for Amtrak to continue operation of the threatened services, and a long-term, permanent source of capital funding for improved, expanded rail passenger service.

In large part, the historical pro-highway, pro-aviation, anti-rail bias in federal transportation policy is responsible for Amtrak's dilemma. To require Amtrak to achieve operational self-sufficiency when competing modes are the recipients of huge amounts of tax dollars, many from general revenue sources, makes no sense in a responsible transportation policy. NARP feels Amtrak's agreement to achieve operating self-sufficiency by 2002 was ill-advised in the absence of an in-place commitment to the necessary capital funding by the Congress.

Americans repeatedly have indicated their interest in improved rail passenger service and have expressed a willingness to have part of their gasoline tax payments dedicated toward such service. It is time for the Congress to provide a stable funding source for Amtrak. It is time for federal transportation policy to respond to the public, to focus on moving people, not on moving vehicles. Survival and expansion of intercity rail passenger service, including the long-distance routes, are essential to this goal. It is essential also that Amtrak continue its efforts to build revenue and better utilize its equipment and other resources, and continue to make itself an increasingly important part of America's transportation future.

The trains Amtrak now plans to discontinue on May 10, 1997, are:

The St. Louis-Little Rock-Dallas-Fort Worth-San Antonio portion of the Chicago-El Paso-Tucson-Los Angeles *Texas Eagle*, which runs three days a week; the Salt Lake City-Las Vegas-Los Angeles portion of the Chicago-Omaha-Denver-Los Angeles *Desert Wind*, which runs three days a week; the Denver-Wyoming-Ogden-Boise-Portland portion of the Chicago-Seattle *Pioneer*, which runs three days a week; and the daily Albany-Boston segment of the Chicago-New York/Boston *Lake Shore Ltd.*

Initially, on August 8, Amtrak had announced that these trains would be discontinued effective November 10, 1996. On November 10, Amtrak did make one change included in the August 8 announcement: the triweekly Los Angeles to Miami *Sunset Limited* was truncated at Sanford, Florida, 24 miles short of Orlando. Amtrak says this will generate major savings; NARP fears the move will be counterproductive, significantly reducing *Sunset* ridership and revenues.

Amtrak's August 8 announcement set off a virtual firestorm of public reaction, in many cases highlighted by cities that would lose all their Amtrak service. These services often utilize facilities in which the cities have made substantial financial investments, some of those investments as recent as this year. Congress responded by appropriating additional funds to support the continued operation of the affected trains for six months through May 10, 1997. Congress acted to provide time for other solutions to be sought for the continued operation of these trains. NARP is alarmed by the tone and substance of Amtrak's recent actions following Congressionally-mandated continuance of the four threatened routes.

Amtrak's decisions leading to the August 8 announcement were made without public hearings or other opportunities for the public and elected officials to have meaningful input and to take action to head off the discontinuances. The process leading to the announcements failed to take into account the public investment in Amtrak and rapidly rising public support for rail passenger service in this country. Customer demand for the threatened services had been high. In recent months, Amtrak has turned away thousands of potential riders for these services, partly by focusing its resources on other services.

It appears the decision to discontinue the Albany-Boston segment of the *Lake Shore Limited* was driven by operational convenience, rather than any financial reason. This practice is sadly reminiscent of the days when the individual freight railroads operated the nation's passenger trains.

In conjunction with the announced discontinuances, Amtrak stated it would make cost-effective service improvements to other routes, returning to daily operation the Chicago-Portland/Seattle *Empire Builder*, the Chicago-Bay Area *California Zephyr* and the Chicago-New Orleans *City of New Orleans*. Amtrak also said it would inaugurate two new services, reinstating the *Broadway Limited* between New York and Chicago by way of Pittsburgh and adding a third New York to Florida train, the *Silver Palm*.

To date, Amtrak has added the third New York to Florida train and has extended to Chicago the coach-only, New York to Pittsburgh *Three Rivers*. NARP is disappointed by Amtrak's failure to restore the full-service *Broadway Limited* and to return daily service to the other routes, as contemplated in Amtrak's business plan. NARP believes most of the other planned improvements can be implemented quickly and urges Amtrak to do so. NARP challenges Amtrak's assertion that it does not have sufficient equipment to implement the improvements while continuing the Congressionally-mandated services.

Noting that Amtrak has displayed an almost grudging reluctance to continue the operation of the trains subject to the Congressional mandate and the additional funding provided by Congress, NARP calls on Amtrak to take immediate steps to realize the potential of these trains and to maximize their ridership. Since these trains must run, make them succeed.

Finally, NARP is concerned by the recent action of the Amtrak Board directing management to discontinue the four trains no later than May 10, 1997, the date the Congressionally-mandated operation expires. Amtrak's Board stated that the threatened routes can be continued after May 10, 1997, "only to the extent that state and local funding becomes available to support their continued operation." For the Board to implicitly tell management that state or local funding represented the only acceptable alternative to discontinuance reflects an unacceptable bias against these services. Amtrak Management should exert every effort to find viable ways to continue operation of the threatened trains or to provide suitable service alternatives to the affected communities in order to avoid further reduction of Amtrak's already-skeletal system. Such is consistent with the Congressional intent manifested in the service-continuation mandate. Amtrak must find a way to continue these services or provide suitable alternate services to the important cities along these routes.

It is time for Americans to speak up in support of their rail passenger services--and demand a truly national system. The failure to speak out today may mean it is too late tomorrow.

Christmas on Delmarva Rails

By Jack M. Turner

A Ride on the *Eastern Shore Express*

Across the Chesapeake Bay from Norfolk VA stands the Delmarva Peninsula, a charming rural area that is home to many farms and scores of fishing boats. The name "Delmarva" derives from the tri-state region that comprises the narrow peninsula, from north to south: Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. US Highway 13 runs the length of the peninsula, traversing the wondrous Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel to the south and linking with highways, , bridges, and ferryboats to the north.

The Pennsylvania Railroad operated daily passenger trains from New York and Philadelphia down the length of the Delmarva Peninsula until 1958. The southern terminus for the PRR shore trains was at Cape Charles VA, where passengers were transferred directly to waiting ferryboats or steamers to Little Creek, on the outskirts of Norfolk. These trains were popular with travelers wishing a direct route to Norfolk and with military men based in the Hampton Roads/Norfolk area who wished to visit Northeastern cities. At various times, rail passenger cars were carried aboard a rail ferry directly to the opposite side of the Chesapeake Bay.

When passenger service on the Eastern Shore ended, residents were left with the option of catching a bus or driving their own cars to leave the shore. To the south, both the automobile and the bus required a ferryboat ride across the bay to from Cape Charles or Kiptopeke to Little Creek. It was not until the 1960s that the bridge-tunnel was opened, dramatically cutting travel time to Norfolk and points beyond.

In this context one could reasonably assume that passenger trains would never again turn a wheel on the Delmarva Peninsula. As it was, the Pennsy and successors Penn Central and Conrail ran only limited freight service as far south as Cape Charles where boxcars and other rail equipment had to be ferried to Little Creek via a railroad car float. In an era of corporate downsizing, the southern portion of the Delmarva rail line was sold to the newly formed Eastern Shore Railroad, which eventually opened the door for the members of the Delmarva Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society to arrange occasional passenger specials.

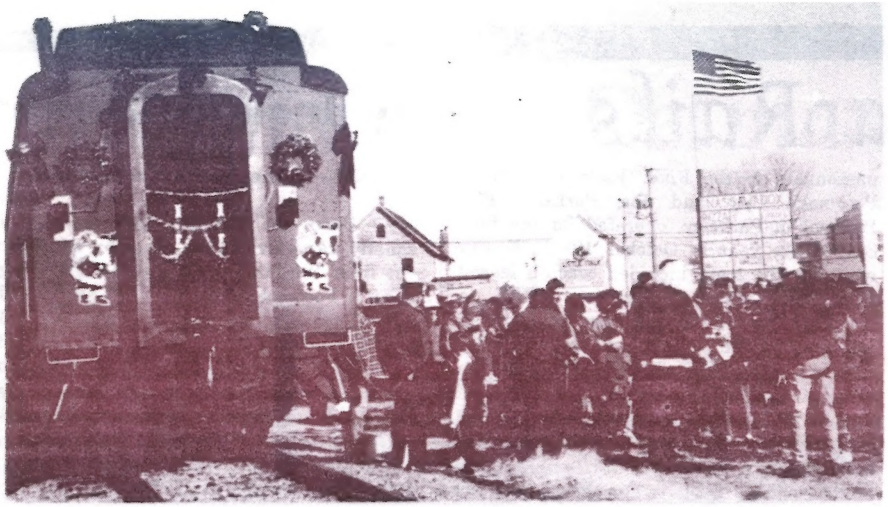
Through the years the Delmarva Chapter and its president, Johnny Bates, forged an excellent working relationship with the short line, resulting in a number of interesting excursions at various points in the year. Foremost among these has been the annual *Eastern Shore Special* from Pocomoke City MD to Parksley VA. The *Eastern Shore Special,* designed to carry passengers to the River Rails Festival in Pocomoke City and the Parksley Fall Festival in Parksley, operated for the fifth consecutive year in October 1995. Equipment for the train included coaches leased from the Tidewater Chapter, NRHS, a privately owned dining car of Amtrak lineage, and the Delmarva Chapter's parlor car *City of Danville,* which was built for the Norfolk & Western in 1927 and named *Diplomat.* The car later was operated by Wabash Railroad on its *Wabash Cannonball* before being relegated to N&W maintenance of way service. Sometime in the early 1950s the car's name was changed to its present designation.

The second most notable trip run by the Delmarva Chapter has been its Santa Claus train which has operated during the past four years from Cape Charles to Parksley. Though not open for public ridership, the Santa train makes quite a sight as it plies the rails from near the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula to one of the peninsula's northernmost Virginia communities which also is home to the Eastern Shore Railway Museum.

Dawn on Oct 21, 1995 reveals a squally, rainy day as my son John and I set out from Washington DC for a fairly long drive to Pocomoke City MD. The sky is still dumping copious amounts of rain as we pull into Pocomoke at 11am. Nonetheless, we find a generous number of passengers waiting to board the second run of the day by the *Eastern Shore Express.* No doubt the number would have been even higher had rain not interfered with many locals' desire to attend the outdoor festivals scheduled for both towns.

A pair of Eastern Shore Railway locomotives named *Parksley and Pocomoke City* stand poised to pull a six-car train 25 miles south to Parksley for the second time today. Three Tuscan-red coaches from the Tidewater Chapter look very familiar from years gone by on Norfolk Southern steam specials. I learn that the cars were sent up from across the Chesapeake Bay aboard an Eastern Shore Railroad car float. The float still makes regular trips between Cape Charles and Little River with a Delmarva Power coal train its heaviest user.

(Photo on p. 12:) A good crowd boards the day's *Eastern Shore Express* round trip on Oct 21, 1995 at Pocomoke City MD. The Tuscan-red coaches were formerly used in Norfolk Southern steam excursions. (Above:) The *Eastern Shore Express* is set to leave Parksley VA en route to Pocomoke City MD on Oct 21, 1995. Photos by the author.



Santa visits with children at Nassawaddox VA on the annual Santa Claus train from Cape Charles to Parksley, over the rails of the Eastern Shore Railway.

We are underway at 11:32am and tripmaster Johnny Bates generously offers us the chance to sit in the *City of Danville.* The car has been lovingly restored by chapter members and now contains moveable leather chairs at one end and a dining table at the other end. Bates is quick to note that the chapter plans further renovations as time and finances permit.

The rail line passes through forests and agricultural fields as it makes it way across the state line and into Virginia. The small towns of New Church and Oak Hall pass in the blink of an eye, though we are moving along at perhaps 30mph. Several county roads are crossed as we continue southward and an Eastern Shore Railroad official is spotted flagging each grade crossing. He obviously knows the shortest route between points, as he seems to beat the train to each crossing.

Walking through the train, I notice that there is a strong contingent of passengers aboard today's run. Everyone seems delighted to be aboard the train; perhaps this enthusiasm is fueled by the region's isolation from the nearest passenger train routes. One hour after departing Pocomoke City we arrive in Parksley at 12:32pm. The rain clouds have broken and many of the happy passengers detrain to take part in the local festivities. They will soon by replaced by patrons who took the morning's first southbound train down from Pocomoke.

While the engines run around the train, John and I take a look inside the beautifully restored railway station which serves as the Eastern Shore Railway Museum. The depot was moved from a nearby community years earlier and today houses a gift shop and many artifacts from local railroading history. A small rail yard stands behind the museum and houses several interesting pieces of rolling stock including sleeper *Fairfax River,* a former RF&P Railway Post Office car, and cabooses from the Pennsy and Wabash Lines. The sleeper is especially impressive as its original purple letterboards have been restored and numerous other original touches are evident. The car is owned by Johnny Bates and is still in the restoration process.

The northbound *Eastern Shore Express* departs Parksley on time at 1pm and passes several typical shore houses, two-story structures with neatly manicured yards. Hallowe'en decorations on many of these homes appear to have taken quite a bit of planning as they catch the eye and tie in the autumn season with the spirited holiday.

As we retrace our route back to Pocomoke City, I learn that the Eastern Shore Railway regularly moves several auto racks from Pocomoke to Cape Charles where they are car-floated to Little Creek for shipment over Norfolk Southern rails to points beyond. The auto carriers originate at Newark DE and are interchanged from Conrail to the Eastern Shore at Pocomoke City. The train continues past the edge of Temperanceville and through Oak Hall, after which US Highway 13 comes into view across a large field. At 2:03pm we pull into Pocomoke and our train empties out while another collection of passengers prepares to board for the day's third and final round trip to Parksley.

Santa Claus Is Coming To Town

Traveling on US Highway 13, one quickly recognizes the rural nature of the lower Delmarva Peninsula. A couple of large motels serve travelers near the entrance to the bridge-tunnel, but mostly there are smaller mom and pop places in the various towns. The few chain businesses that do stand out are places like Hardee's, 84 Lumber, and WalMart. There aren't any large malls with JC Penneys, Saks Fifth Avenue or Dillards. The people of the shore are satisfied with this arrangement; however, there is one glaring omission that is obvious at Christmastime: "Where's Santa?".

The jolly old man, it seems, makes an appearance early each December as he rides a special Eastern Shore Railway train from Cape Charles to Parksley, making stops at each hamlet to meet the children and take requests for the upcoming holiday. The train is run by the railway as a goodwill gesture and staffed by members of the Delmarva Chapter.

Crisp weather greets the crew as they load up the one-car train in Cape Charles on December 2, 1995. Santa is well assisted by a trio of elves attired in green and red garb and a dozen kids make their way trackside to speak with Santa. Each Christmas request is noted by Santa, who advises the kids "Be sure to tell your mom and dad" as he hands them a candy cane.

Once again the *Pocomoke City* and *Parksley* are in charge, while Santa and a small cast of crew members take up residence in the *City of Danville.* The train departs Cape Charles at 10:20am, initially heading eastward until crossing US 13, where surprised motorists smile as Santa and company wave from the rear platform. A Christmas wreath adorns the rear of the car and ornaments and tinsel garlands hang from each window. A sound system plays Christmas songs out the rear of the old parlor car, which obviously pleases pedestrians and residents along the railway.

Beyond US 13 the rails turn north leading to the first stop in Cheriton. Santa, a.k.a. Dr. Donald Hattier, holds court with a hearty group of children, one of whom asks if he can ride the train. There are smiles all around as the children's faces display such wonder that Santa has come right to little ol' Cheriton. The remnants of a long abandoned station platform are discovered beneath the weeds and grass that line the tracks. At the head end of the one-car train, the lead locomotive flies a pair of white extra movement flags that have a caricature of Santa Claus on them.

North of Cheriton the train follows excepted rail to Nassawaddox that dictates operation at 20mph. As the Santa Special passes a lettuce field, workers turn and wave to the jolly old man standing in the rear vestibule. There is a gentle sway passing over these slightly wavy rails yet the slow speed keeps it from becoming a real rock 'n roll ride.

The train passes through Eastville and is joined by US 13 which is but a few feet to the west of the railway. As the train slips through the town of Birds Nest, Santa appears in the rear vestibule to wave and shout "Merry Christmas". Between towns he cranks up his CB radio and talks to truckers on the nearby highway who think "Santa" is just some guy's handle. Some of the truckers eventually pass the train and soon the CB crackles with "Hey good buddy, you really are Santa!"

A large contingent of kids await Santa's arrival in Nassawaddox where jolly St. Nick and his helpers visit for a half hour. There are smiles galore from children of various races and apparent differing economic conditions which gives onlookers a warm feeling. Departure comes at 12:35pm and thus far the train has covered the 19 miles from Cape Charles in the scheduled two hours and 15 minutes.

Back on board, Santa's helpers are preparing for the next stop and partaking of a brief lunch in the dining area of the *City of Danville.* A disc jockey from radio station KHI-FM files a live remote broadcast from the train urging townfolk in nearby communities to come out and see Santa. During his reports the DJ plays interviews he taped with children at previous stops. Coupled with posters in store windows, the live remotes seem to reach the intended audience as crowds are impressive at Exmore and later towns. Brief 15-min stops are made at

the smaller towns of Painter and Keller while Melfa rates a 20-min visit. The governing factor for length of stops is the number of children awaiting the train, as no child will be denied the chance to see Santa.

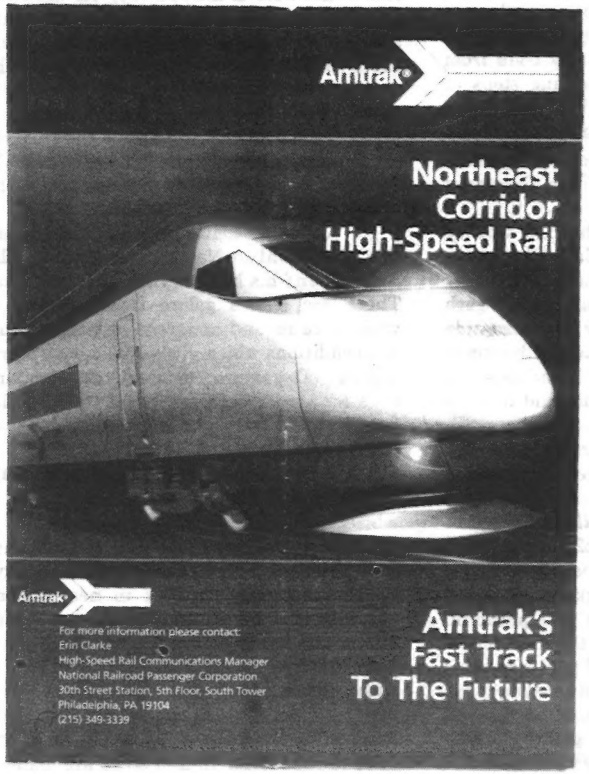
The parallel highway proves convenient for many residents, some of whom pace the train northward from their town for a couple miles and others who follow the Santa train to its next stop in order to satisfy the wishes of their youngsters. At 2:50pm the train glides into Onley, where another 30 or so children eagerly greet their visitor. The mayor of Onley, who is in his eighties, gladly pronounces that his town has a population of 620 which would be larger if you count nearby areas such as Burton's Shore.

Another half hour running brings the special into Parksley where the day's largest crowd cheers Santa as he detrains. The local business association is one of the trip's large sponsors and Santa's arrival is on the same day as a silent auction at the volunteer fire department across the street. While the crowd lingers around Santa Claus, the *City of Danville* is gently pulled forward and backed into the Chapter's little yard for a long winter's nap. The locomotives are cut off and run light back to Cape Charles leaving behind happy memories of another successful Santa train.

The Delmarva Chapter took summer 1996 off to concentrate on equipment upgrades while the Eastern Shore Railway performed some trackwork. But the Santa train should run this December and chapter members hope to resume excursions north of Parksley next year and perhaps one day offer public trips to Cape Charles. **While the Eastern Shore of Virginia may seem a world away from routes usually noted for great train rides, the rural charm of the area and dedicated efforts of the Delmarva Chapter make this one of the most interesting operations in the south.**

For info on possible 1997 excursions, send an SASE to: Delmarva Chapter NRHS, PO Box 1791, Parksley VA 23421.

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS



Amtrak has produced a slick color folder (pictured here) about its NE Corridor High-Speed Rail project. In it Amtrak promises for the 21st Century the following: Fast, Frequent, Reliable Service: Reduced trip times between all stations on the NEC; hourly trains between Boston & NY and two trains each hour between NY and Washington; flexible travel times and better amenities; excellent on-time performance. Customer Amenities: Faster service, superior accommodations, wide seats and large restrooms; 344-passenger capacity; elegant bistro cars and new menus; business travel amenities including phone and outlets for computers. Jobs: Project construction and manufacturing will produce over 4500 jobs locally & nationside; improved rail service will generate nearly 5000 jobs regionally. Boosting the Economy: Some $440 million annually in increased business sales activity; enhances the region's growing service economy; shorter trip times make NEC cities attractive sites for locating businesses and homes. Safest train in the world: Amtrak's NEC is the safest rail line in the country; the new trains, building on this tradition, will set safety standards worldwide; special designs and materials will protect passengers; onboard diagnostic systems will monitor train performance, alerting crews to changing conditions or automatically triggering safety responses. Environmentally Friendly: Electrification reduces air pollution, helping states comply with the Clean Air Act; upgrades to existing tracks will avoid enormous environmental consequences of new highway, airport and rail line construction; annual fuel consumption projected to drop by 14 million gallons with the switch to electric trains. Congestion Relief: Increased ridership eases congestion at airports and on I-95 and provides an alternative to airport and highway expansion; projected to reduce air passenger volume between NY & Boston by 37%; will reduce automobile traffic on I-95, particularly at rush hour.

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From across the Pacific on Nov 24 comes news that the Australian federal government is putting Australian National's above-the-rail operations and its interest in National Rail up for sale. AN operates the **Indian Pacific** (Sydney-Perth), **Ghan** (Adelaide-Alice Springs) and **Overland** (Adelaide-Melbourne) intercity passenger trains--the only traditional overnight trains in the country outside Queensland (which has a fair number of them, all narrow gauge). (In New South Wales, Countrylink has a few overnight schedules, but they use the same XPT trainsets that provide day service.) AN also operates intrastate freight service in South Australia and Tasmania. National Rail operates interstate freight service over the rails of AN and the state-owned railroads (it's sort of an Amtrak for freight). The government said US railroads are four times more efficient that AN and NR, implying that these companies could become profitable if privatized. The government would retain ownership of AN's track. —Mike Blaszak.

Sources tell RTN that at least one dispatcher in SP's Denver control center is making a real effort to keep Amtrak "moving" on the SP/Rio Grande **California Zephyr** route west of Denver. Trackside observers say the trains have been running closer to time in 1996 than in many previous years.

After Thanksgiving, some **Desert Wind** runs have been very crowded, with the trains having few seats available east of Las Vegas. One source said a relative who boarded an eastbound train at Las Vegas found the **Wind** almost full and somewhat uncomfortable.

After telling everyone that they would not issue Thanksgiving timetables, Amtrak did anyway, in several varieties—NE Corridor, Empire Service, Keystone Service and NY-Washington. There were cards and folders both—not clear whether each variety had one of each. All were printed in

brown ink. The graphics above (an oak leaf and acorns) appeared on the front of folders. All schedules were effective Nov 26-Dec 2.

Metro-North produced a more attractive and substantial folder, one for each line, each a different color. The front page graphics showed the Mayflower ship in silhouette, with "Thanksgiving Greetings" below it in an antique typeface. They were effective Nov 28-Dec 1.

Viewliners will appear on the Boston **Lake Shore Ltd** section, trains 448/449, in mid-Dec: Dec 15 for 448, Dec 17 for 449. This info emerged as a rumor in early Dec and finally an official announcement. Amtrak told agents that "Passengers reaccommodated from roomette/bedroom space into Viewliner space are protected from any fare increase as long as they make no other change. If the change results in a lower fare, this may be refunded without charge." Amtrak noted that with this change the only train that still have Heritage 10/6 sleepers in regular service is the **Night Owl**.

A thorough check of the Chicago station area Nov 24 by correspondent George Danchisen revealed only seven Superliner I cars that had not been repainted with the Superliner II-type stripes. At the rate they are progressing, all the older Superliners should be re-striped within weeks. (Too bad Amtrak can't spend as much effort on fixing bad-ordered Superliners in need of repairs.)

Sunday River Ski Train Portland to Bethel, Maine, will begin runs Dec 21, on Fridays and weekends until Easter (Mar 30). The train had run three winter seasons, but

operators found it too poorly patronized to be profitable and they sold it earlier this fall, but arranged for the Bethel Mountain Line, a subsidiary of Belfast & Moosehead Lake RR, to run a similar ski train. The new operator runs a summer tourist train along the coast in mid-Maine, attracting 45,000 riders. The new service will be called the Sunday River Express. It will accommodate 350 riders on a train of varied service classes, with two dining cars, TVs with video games and VCRs, and full breakfast and dinner menus. The tentative schedule has the train leaving Portland at 6:15am, with an 8:50am arrival in Bethel, where new buses take riders six miles to Sunday River. The new operator said he might retain some cars in Bethel for summer tourist runs in the White Mts.

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NARP warned Dec 6 that: "The painful process of developing a 1998 Clinton Administration budget is well underway. The DOT has received its passback, which is the revised budget request it gets from the office of Management & Budget. Numbers evidently are disappointing for Amtrak, transit and highways. Outgoing Secy Péna is not in a strong position to defend the DOT request in the White House. Indeed, we understand that even last year, Rodney Slater, federal highway chief and White House intimate, advocated for the entire DOT budget in the White House instead of Péna. That all means that the need for pro-Amtrak letters is greater than ever. Be sure to write or copy your letter to Vice President Gore, because he is interested in passenger trains and in your vote four years from now. Also note that even Amtrak says there is no more room to cut routes without wrecking the long distance network, and thus the willingness of the Congress as a whole to support corridor services in the NE or anywhere else. That means there is great peril in going below Amtrak's $245 million operating request. Finnally, the Clinton Administration has not supported any of the key reforms in the reauthorization bills that would help Amtrak improve its finances without cutting routes. Transportation programs in general seem to have dropped off the President's list of priorities. An anonymnous White House source quoted by the Washington Post said that when the President's budget numbers for domestic discretionary programs come out, you'll hear plenty of screaming. We have to assume that that includes Amtrak."

Channel Tunnel damage was worse than at first believed in the Nov 18 fire on a truck-carrying train. The one open tube has resumed freight service, and passenger trains began running again Dec 4, with half-hour delays. But repairs could take half a year and cost $83 million plus $20 million for trucks and equipment destroyed and more for lawsuits.

NARP reported that subcommittee assignments in Congress should be decided by the end of January, but there is word that Kay Bailey Hutchison will probably keep her chairmanship of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, which has jurisdiction over Amtrak.

The consist of Amtrak train 12 of Nov 23, the **Fast Mail** that derailed the morning of the 23rd (see last issue) was: engines 910 & 901 (AEM7s); cars 1565 MHC, Amfleet I coaches 21647, 21637 (Washington to Sprinfield), 21095, 21195, 21648 & 21125, Amcafe 43043, MHCs 1506, 1404, 1510 (Washington to Boston), & 1415 (Wash-NY).

1996 has been the worst year ever for numbers of airline fatalities, but the death rate has not increased because numbers of individuals flying have risen so much.

A bomb exploded in a Paris subway train the evening of Dec 3, killing three and injuring 88, three critically.

General Motors began leasing electric cars in parts of California and Arizona Dec 5.

Amtrak's reservations computer broke down Nov 29, the day after Thanksgiving, forcing agents to laboriously hand-write tickets and slowing operations. A Washington DC agent told the NY Times the result there was "total chaos".

Amtrak's use of standard consists on long-distance trains was a plus after the derailment of the **Fast Mail** Nov 23, as it permitted such smooth switches as the north-bound **Silver Meteor** to turn that day in Philadelphia to become the southbound **Silver Palm** with only a 2-hour delay.

The freight railroads plan to stop contributing to CRASH, a safety group that opposes big trucks, and they are reaching a truce with the trucking industry to permit larger, multiple-trailer trucks. CRASH will continue working for a safer, more environmentally sound restriction of huge trucks.

Yosemite Park entrance fees for cars and for bus passengers will increase in Jan, as will those for other National Parks and wilderness areas. The Yosemite car fee for a 7-day pass will increase from $5 to $20, while a bus rider's fee will go from $3 to $10. Environmentalists immediately criticized the large rise for bus riders on the grounds that it will discourage use of public transportation. The cost of an Amtrak-bus trip to the park presumably will go up by about $15.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer ran an article Nov 25 telling of an **Empire Builder** trip from Chicago Nov 22-24 that was 12 hours late. "First there was the drug bust in Wisconsin. Then the train hit an abandoned car on the tracks in Minnesota. Later, false indicator lights delayed the trip. Next came the blizzard. Fuel ran low. There was a fight between a drunken father and his son. A freight train derailed in Idaho [that derailment, at Crossport, accounted for 8.5 hrs]. And finally, the food ran out, so the train had to wait for Kentucky Fried Chicken in Spokane."

Next Transportation Secretary will probably be Rodney Slater, as William Daley was nominated by President Clinton to be Commerce Secretary, Dec 13. Slater would be not the first, as some reports said, but the second black man to be DOT head. Slater got high marks for lobbying in the White House for good funding for rail and transit.

This issue's news is updated through December 13, 1996.

MORE EAST COAST NEWS

NJ Transit MidTown Direct train 6651 on Nov 19, which left NY's Penn Station at 5:47pm had an engine failure at Broad St. Newark, and over 1000 passengers had to be transferred to three later westbound trains, which platformed on the eastbound track. This caused many delays for both east- and west-bound trains that evening. A rescue engine finally towed the disabled train to the Meadows Maintenance Complex at 7:20pm.

An editorial appeared in the Asbury Park Press Nov 29 railing against NJ Transit's decision to defer plans for a new rail line into Lakewood NJ and to go ahead with improved bus service on already traffic-clogged route 9 instead. NJT's slogan is "The jway to go." The editorial was titled "No way to go." Why put off building this new rail line that will have to be built anyway? So far, NJT has bowed to the NIMBYs.

NJ Transit's Nov 10 NEC line timetable has Saturday shopper specials departing Trenton at 9:57, 10:57 and 11:57am through Jan 11. These trains do not stop at Rahway, Linden or Elizabeth. There are four trains returning, leaving NY at 4:03, 5:03, 5:58 and 7:03pm.

The LIRR released its Oct 21 Ronkonkoma Branch timetable effective Nov 18.—Bob Underwood.

Long Island RR commuters were shaken when on Dec 9 a bank robbery suspect boarded a Ronkonkoma line train at Wyandanch NY, and took an elderly male passenger hostage when police closed in. Police were able to apprehend him with no injuries, but the incident reminded commuters of the time three years ago when a Brooklyn man fired an assault rifle on a train, killing 6 and injuring 19.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"...Sunset Limited employees worry that their train may be next to shut down.

"The train loses so much money because of the length of its 3,066-mile route, the relative lack of major cities along the route and the fact that it can't get a mail contract with the U.S. Postal Service because it runs only three times a week.

" 'I don't think there are any plans to curtail service' because it links other Amtrak routes, said Marci Larson, a spokeswoman for Amtrak's division covering the central United States.

" 'But I think a lot of people always expect Amtrak to be there until it's about to be gone,' she said."

—Dan Feldstein in *Houston Chronicle*, Nov 10.

RAIL FANTRIPS

EXCURSION OF THE MONTH

Apr 1997 (date TBA): The Great Canadian Railway Journey. Springtime transcon rail cruise across Canada & thru the Canadian Rockies aboard North America's finest train, the **Canadian**, recently refurbished to its 1950s style with addition of modern amenities. Day 1: **Adirondack** NY-Montreal, overnite Montreal. Day 2: Montreal; morning bus tour of city, overnite. Day 3: Lake Ontario—LRC train to Toronto; overnite Toronto. Day 4: Canadian Shield: begins **Canadian** trip; see countless lakes, streams & muskegs. Day 5: Prairies. call on Winnipeg. Day 6: Icefields Parkway. Lv train in Jasper for scenic hwy journey; overnite Banff. Day 7: Banff: Free day in mountain environs, overnite. Day 8: Lake Louise & Jasper. Back to Jasper to reboard train thru Rockies. Day 9: Vancouver: Bus transfer to Vancouver, city tour, Talgo Train to Seattle. Day 10: Fly home to Newark NJ. $1895-$2095. Railroad Passenger Services, PO Box 652, Union NJ 07083-0652. 908-688-7277.

Dec 31-Jan 1: New Year's in NY. Private car trip on "Dover Harbor". From Wash DC early Dec 31, bkfst aboard; free day in NYC. New Year champagne reception aboard "Dover Harbor". Jan 1 free day, board train after dinner. $219-$464. Wash. DC Chapter NRHS, c/o Henry Bielstein, 13425 Reid Circle, Ft. Washington MD 20744-6522. 301-292-9592.

Feb 1&2, 1997: Annual Railroad Hobby Show sponsored by Amherst Rwy Society, largest show in NE. Expanded show. $5 daily admission. Better Living Center & the Young Bldg, West Springfield MA. 10am-5pm. Info: Robert A. Buck, Show Director, Amherst Rwy Society, Box 718, Warren MA 01083. 413-436-0242. 2mis from Springfield Amtrak Sta; taxi or bus.

Feb 8-10,: Snow Train '97. Rail-bus trip to N. Ontario. From Dearborn & Birmingham MI to Sault Ste. Marie, ON. Algoma Central Rwy to Agawa Canyon & ret. Return includes stop at Bavarian Inn in Frankenmuth for chicken or beef dinner. Back to Dearborn 7pm. Two 1st Cl options: priv car or classic dome. $315 up. Bluewater NRHS,Box 296, Roy-al Oak MI 48068.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Excursion of the Month appears once a month, in alternate issues. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709, or E-mail to rtnews1@ix.netcom.com.

MIDWEST REPORT

Back-alley railroading at Boone, Iowa: Blasts of the air horn herald infrequent and unexpected appearances of cars at cross streets. On the Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad, one can ride "behind Chinese steam" across a high trestle on the old FDDM&S interurban line, or at times take a short trip into downtown Boone aboard a former South Shore electric car (no. 106 here), as Don Scott recorded during an E.R.A. fantrip on Sep 1, 1994.

The new timetable for the Burlington Northern suburban service has been published. It has an effective date of December 1, superseding the previous October 30, 1994 edition. New weekday eastbounds are a 5:54 a.m. express from Aurora (#1206) which, after stopping at Route 59 and Naperville, runs 27 miles nonstop to Union Station in 33 minutes, and a 4:00 p.m. reverse commuter express from Aurora (#1268) stopping at Route 59, Naperville, Lisle and Downers Grove Main Street before running nonstop to Union Station. There's one new westbound train: reverse commuter #1203 to Aurora, leaving Union Station at 6:35 a.m. As is typical, times of other trains were adjusted by a minute or two, and the close-in stops at Western Avenue and Cicero are skipped by a few more trains. Off-peak frequencies are unchanged, leaving some awkward two-hour gaps in what otherwise is an hourly schedule.

The new timetable was placed in racks about two weeks early, and crew members report that some commuters relied on it without checking the effective date, resulting in complaints when they missed trains. The new issue was quickly replaced with the old one for the interim.

Though the railroad is still technically Burlington Northern, the new timetable has the name "Burlington Northern Santa Fe" and crew members now have "BNSF" lapel pins. Commuters have been instructed to make checks for tickets payable to "BNSF Railway."

Chicago Transit Authority, for the first time in memory, began posting schedules for its rapid transit trains at stations on the Ravenswood ("Brown") Line Nov 26. Stations on all lines should have posted schedules by midwinter. Like most long-established transit operators, CTA previously ran trains at set intervals without posting or publishing schedules, because the headways were short enough not to inconvenience patrons seriously if a train was missed. Due to gradual cutbacks, though, off-peak schedules are down to as few as three trains an hour, or one an hour at night. That's a long time to spend standing on an L platform in the winter, and CTA is also concerned about exposing patrons to criminal activity. The posted schedules should help riders time their arrivals at the station to minimize the wait. CTA claims a 97.8% on time performance for its rail service.

Amtrak's Nov 10 nationwide timetable was available in Union Station Nov 29 (it may have arrived earlier), but the only Nov 10 individual train timetables available were for the **Capitol Limited, Empire Builder, City of New Orleans** and **California Zephyr.**

I noted the other night that the Des Plaines IL passenger station on the UP Northwest Line has been brightly decorated with white lights for the holidays. It's relatively common to see wreaths and bows on our stations, but this is the first time I have seen lights.

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Chicago Sun-Times reported Dec 2 that the Illinois DOT may ask the state legislature to pass a law permitting it to open the operation of the state's 403b passenger trains to competitive bidding. The trains supported by the state are the **Illinois Zephyr,** the **Illini** and the **State House.** According to IDOT, annual ridership on these trains is 82,193, 94,553 and 121,800 respectively.

IDOT's motivation is Amtrak's abrupt escalation of the cost of operating the trains. Linda Wheeler, director of planning and programming for IDOT, claimed that Amtrak wanted less than $3 million from the state in 1994 to run the trains, billed $6.5 million for this year (fiscal 1997), and says it wants $13 million for fiscal 1998 (which begins July 1, 1997). "By 2000, the cost (to the state] could escalate to $20 million for the same service," Wheeler continued.

Under the bidding concept, "we'd go out for private contractors" instead of just awarding the contract to Amtrak, said IDOT spokesman Richard Adorjan. While the competition would be open to Amtrak and private concerns, it's pretty clear the state is looking to Metra to take over the routes. "Metra has expressed cautious interest," according to the article. "If we were to run the service, we'd want to run a quality service and it must pay for itself in terms of fares and subsidies," Metra Chairman Jeff Ladd told the paper. Amtrak could not be reached for comment.

My commentary: When the Illinois Attorney General gets hold of this idea, the lawyers (if they are competent) will have to tell IDOT that there are serious problems with this proposal. It could be argued that the federal statutory scheme establishing Amtrak preempts legislation by individual states interfering with the 403b procedure for state-supported passenger service. Under the agreements between Amtrak and the railroads, Amtrak has the exclusive right to operate passenger trains over railroad-owned lines, and the railroads have no obligation to allow parties other than Amtrak to run the trains. I would be very surprised if Amtrak would voluntarily allow a competitor to begin running trains on these lines in direct competition with Amtrak-operated trains (**Texas Eagle, Ann Rutledge, City of New Orleans).** And the railroads, if they would entertain the idea at all, would likely demand that the state put up hefty amounts of insurance--$250 million or so--to protect them against liability in the event of a disaster involving a state-operated train. This alone would likely make stand-alone state operation an uneconomic proposition.

Beyond the legalities, though, the proposal makes a tremendous amount of sense. Competition usually reduces prices and, by necessity, increases efficiency. Perhaps federal legislation should be drafted to permit states to "secede" from Amtrak while sharing Amtrak's right to compel use of railroad right of way for incremental costs.

One of the facts of life that annoys me to no end is that Metra has made, and is making, an enormous investment in equipment that, for the most part, is idle 16 hours a day and all weekend. There's no compelling reason why this equipment shouldn't be used to provide a comprehensive rail service to points 2-3 hours away from Chicago, like Champaign, Bloomington-Normal, Galesburg and Rockford (and Milwaukee, for that matter) during the midday hours. There's excess capacity on all these lines but the IC main to Champaign, making fuel, wages, maintenance and dispatching the only incremental costs.

Observation: Our favorite 403b train, the **Illinois Zephyr,** quietly passed its 25th birthday in November. For a quarter century this humble service has linked Chicago with the western Illinois region sometimes called "Forgottonia" for its remoteness from both Lake Michigan and the state capital in Springfield. And, of course, it's the only intercity train that stops in my adopted home town of LaGrange.—Mike Blaszak.

CARS & CONSISTS

***California Zephyr**, train 5, Chicago Nov 24: engines 837 (P40), 7 & 13 (P42s); cars 1569, 1467 & 1409 MHCs, 1713 baggage, Superliner II transition dorm-slpr 39007, Superliner slpr 32012, Superliner IIs 32086 "Louisiana" slpr, 38060 diner, 33043 lounge, Superliners 34095 coach, 31039 coach-bag, 34008 coach, Superliner II 32071 "Arizona" slpr, Superliners 32069 slpr., 38036 diner, 34005 coach & 31003 coach-bag.

***Southwest Chief,** train 4, Chicago Nov 24: engines 812 (P40), 505 (P32) & 324 (F40); cars 1428, 1411, 1450, 1443, 1535 & 1462 MHCs, 1211 bag, Superliner II transition dorm-slpr 39019, Superliners 34075 & 34085 coaches, 31043 coach-bag, 33022 lounge, 38030 diner, 32040 slpr, Superliner II 32096 "Nevada" slpr, private cars 800069 "Cimarron River" & 800045 "Caritas".

***Empire Builder,** train 807, Chicago Nov 24: engine 391 (F40); cars Superliner II 33030 lounge, Superliners 34046 coach & 31004 coach-bag, Hi-level coach 39948, MHCs 1502, 1558 & 1426. (Train 8 for Sun, Nov 24 was due in Chicago on Nov 25 as #8/808 on Monday's schedule. It was delayed by a BNSF derailment in Idaho.)

***Texas Eagle,** train 21, Chicago Nov 24: engines 823 (P40) & 273 (F40); cars 1161 bag, Horizon coaches 54580 & 54530, Superliner II transition dorm-slpr 39038, Superliner slprs 32019 & 32034, Superliner II coaches 34123 & 34136, Superliner 38010 diner, 33024 lounge, 34073 coach, bag 1229 & 1195.

***Capitol Limited,** train 30, Chicago Nov 24: engines 813 (P40) & 369 (F40); cars 1505, 1439 & 1462 MHCs, 1211 bag, Superliner II transition dorm-slpr 39019, Superliners 34075 & 34085 slprs, 31043 coach-bag, 33022 lounge, 38030 diner, slpr 32040, Superliner II slpr 32096 "Nevada". (Engine 813 has new striping: a continuous solid blue to match the new P42 paint scheme instead of the original fading-out striping.)

***Lake Shore Limited,** train 49, Chicago Nov 24: engines 399 & 328 (F40s); cars 1520, 1549, 1567, 1562 & 1537 MHCs, 1191 bag, sleeper 2455 "Elm Grove", Amfleet coaches 25040, 25087, 25011, 25049, 25082 & 25070, Amlounge 28003, diner 8521, Viewliner slprs 62031 "Prairie View" & 62017 "Majestic View", crew slpr 2436 "Pacific Crest", 1248 bag, 1515 MHC. (Train had extra mail cars that did not get on train 41 because of the derailment of train 12 in NJ on the morning of Nov 23.)

***Three Rivers,** train 41, Chicago Nov 24: engines 372 & 382 (F40s); cars 48201 dinette, coaches 44188, 21081 & 21627 (lettered NEDirect Service), road railer 410009. (Unknown other MHCs were removed from train before consist could be recorded.) —George Danchisen.

"MIXED" COMPANY, OR HOW I RODE THE TRAIN TO LYNN LAKE AND LIVED TO TELL ABOUT IT

By Miles Post

Sunday, October 20 found me flying Northwest flights 1026, an MD-82 (N307RC) ONT-MSP and 963, a DC-9-31 (N612NW) MSP-YWG for a rendezvous with a couple of VIA Rail trains I had wanted to ride for a long time. I knew this trip was going to conflict with a couple of other rare-mileage excursions in Illinois, Louisiana and Texas, but I'd already secured the extremely-hard-to-get sleeper space on the "Hudson Bay" during polar bear season and my mind was made up. To reinforce my decision, I noted that the trips in the U.S. involved trackage with very secure futures. This trip to Canada would cover large segments of track that may very well be abandoned within the next several years. As any serious mileage collector knows, the pilgrimage to the northern Manitoba hamlets of Lynn Lake and Churchill are a necessity for, if nothing else, a conversation opener at cocktail parties: "Yes, I've been to Pukatawagan" ("Puk" for short).

"You say there's a university there? It's called WHAT?"

I couldn't readily find any taxis at the Winnipeg airport, but there was a limo right in front of me whose driver was hungry for some business and made me an offer I couldn't refuse. For only a few bucks above what a taxi would've charged, I rode in style to the VIA depot downtown. Unfortunately, the wet bar wasn't stocked; otherwise I could've ridden in even MORE style!

At the former Canadian National station I found Train 693 composed of two F-40PH-2's, a baggage car, two coaches, a diner and three sleepers. All of the cars were ex-Canadian Pacific stainless steel equipment built in the mid-fifties for "The Canadian." These cars were always first-rate, and now that they've been rebuilt and refurbished to the tune of over a million dollars per car by AMF (Atelier Montreal Facility), in my opinion they're the best passenger cars operating in regular service in North America. There were both "Manor" and "Chateau"-series sleepers represented, characterized by slightly different configurations in their accommodations.

In both types of cars, as part of the rebuilding program, an upper and lower berth have been sacrificed and a shower installed where they used to be. This was one of the smartest moves VIA Rail could've made. Being able to take a hot shower at least once every 24 hours is important to a lot of people, especially those addicted to air travel.

We took CN's transcon main line west out of town, switching to the Gladstone Subdivision at Kearns. As this train progresses northward, it gradually changes to less densely trafficked lines, which translates into slower speeds. At North Jct., Manitoba we changed to the Togo Subdivision, which is the beginning of a somewhat new route for this train between there and Hudson Bay, SK. Several years ago, a portion of the original route via Swan River and Mafeking was abandoned, necessitating the re-route. All the mileage collectors who rode the "old way" will now have to come back and ride the "new way!" The train took a somewhat circuitous routing into Saskatchewan for about 190 miles. Politics heavily influenced the building of the railroad to Hudson Bay, and since the line would be used for exporting grain, we were first given a tour of the wheat fields on our way north.

Next morning at The Pas I detrained into a snowstorm for a connection to Train 291, the Lynn Lake Mixed, one of only a handful of mixed trains left in Canada . A lot has been written about this train. It serves a very isolated region of the province and almost all passengers are either "Native Americans," "Indigenous People," or "Cree Indians," depending on how politically correct you want to be. Oh yes, there's also the occasional railfan who makes the trip for whatever reason. Me, I needed the mileage.

Apparently, the key to an enjoyable trip on this train is making sure you don't ride the day the government sustenance checks are distributed to the regular riders. "Pay day" means everyone goes to The Pas and gets rip-roaring drunk and the train is their conveyance back to their home. A friend of mine made this trip several years ago on a "bad" day and had a knife pulled on him. I prefaced my boarding of this train by inquiring with Conductor Moe Watts as to whether I could ride the caboose if things got too "wild and crazy" in coach No. 5186, a 1937 product of Canadian Car and Foundry. He agreed, but said there probably wouldn't be any problems with the handful of passengers. He was right. The funniest thing that happened was a small group of pre-teenaged boys throwing me some bizarre questions and making statements to, I think, see how I would respond. They were blown away that a tourist from Southern California would come all this way to ride "their" train. One of them said, "How come you're here?" and "Have you ever been robbed before?" followed by "Do you own a gun?" and, finally, "My older brother, who's also on board, could kick your ass!" Gradually, the conversation evolved into a discussion of the various strengths of certain alcoholic beverages and the pros and cons of stealing snowmobiles. I scored big points by engaging with them in some intense "thumb wrestling."

At Sherridon, a dismembered moose was loaded into the baggage car. As I was photo-documenting the procedure, the proud hunter held up the severed head for a "photo op"--perhaps a prop for a future "Godfather" sequel? When it was lunch time in the caboose, the crew was "chowing down" on some mooseburgers. Memo to Bullwinkle: You might not want to visit this area. Most of the passengers detrained at Pukatawagan, and one of the boys I had befriended offered me some moose antlers as a going-away gift. I felt bad about declining his kind offer, mainly because I didn't have room for them in my traveling gear.

While some railfans may have had bad experiences with the Natives on this train, let the record show that I did not. Far from it.

I was surprised how scenic this line is, particularly on the north end. There are 585 curves on the Sherridon Subdivision, many of them around the perimeters of lakes and over swift-moving rivers. CN wants to spin this line off to some other carrier, so the future of this whole operation is uncertain. Deferred maintenance has meant some long stretches imposed with slow orders, and arrival into Lynn Lake was about 1:00am October 22.

Figuring that a one-way ride on the Lynn Lake Mixed was sufficient, my next "plan of attack" was to position myself in Thompson for the October 23 departure of VIA Train 693 for Churchill. I really wasn't looking forward to taking the once-a-day Grey Goose bus to Thompson and, instead helped a Thompson-based car rental agency retrieve one of their Jeep Cherokees that some NASA technicians had left in Lynn Lake a day or two earlier. NASA launches weather research balloons from "Lynn" since it's one of the farthest-north places accessible by road.

It was a lot of fun driving the predominantly dirt Highway 391, which became mud with some snow flurries adding to the mix. I checked out a hydroelectric dam at Rat River, complete with warning signs in English and Cree, advising everyone not to get too close to the cliff edge overlooking the spillway. At Thompson, International Nickel Company has an industrial railroad operating for several miles southwest out of town along Highway 6 .

My Canadian Trackside Guide revealed they have three RS-18s and a G-8, but I didn't see them. That night I caught Train 693, which became a mixed train of sorts at Thompson. Several TOFC piggyback flatcars are tacked onto the back of the train. Roads extend only to about Milepost 350 of the Herchmer Subdivision, and Churchill must rely on rail transport for almost everything (now that's my kind of town!). This is one of the few operations left in North America where trailers are loaded onto flatcars "circus" style, that is, where they're driven onto the flats from an end ramp.

Approaching the end of the line, the last few miles of the Herchmer Subdivision are above the tree line, and it's an eerie moonscape-like region. Churchill is a village of about 1100 people, and since there's not a whole lot to do during a layover in October except look for polar bears, that's exactly what I did. Tundra Buggy Tours operates huge "monster truck"-type vehicles that can traverse the rough terrain and elevate tourists to a height beyond the grasp of the tallest polar bear, or so it's hoped. They are truly fascinating creatures. We saw more than two dozen of them and the tour guide said it was the best day he'd experienced. I was also able to get an aerial perspective of the region courtesy of a half hour tour in a Bell 206B Jetranger II (C-FMAO) operated by Midwest Helicopters of Winnipeg. "Polar Bear Alert," an excellent National Geographic program available at most major video stores, explains how Churchill copes with the bears marauding the streets and back alleys of the town. It even shows the then ex-CN equipped steam-heated train backing into the station.

After a hard day of polar bear watching, that night I settled into a lower berth of car "Brock Manor" on Train 692 of October 24 back to Winnipeg. The consist of this trainset was almost identical to the train I rode northbound four days earlier, except it had only two sleepers ("Chateau Varennes" was the mate), and the lead unit, No. 6458, had a bumper sticker displayed on the front that said, "I Stop for Polar Bears!" The on-board and operating crews were extremely friendly and efficient, something that is quite common with VIA.

While flying home on Northwest flights 784, a DC-9-31 (N8945E) and 1027, an MD-82 (N313RC), I reflected on my experiences with Canada's version of Amtrak. Even though VIA took a lot of criticism a few years ago for all their downsizing, the "core" system that is left is quite impressive. With CN now doing their own downsizing in the form of spin-offs or outright abandonments of many of their secondary routes, I hope the Lynn Lake Mixed and the "Hudson Bay" can survive a few years longer. If you haven't made the trip, do so while you can. Time may be running short.

P.S.: I have since learned that CN will be selling off their line between The Pas and Lynn Lake and also the line from The Pas to Churchill to a company called Omnitrax—a holding company that owns the Great Western Railway out of Loveland CO. They also own several other short-line railroads, sort of a smaller version of Railtex. So far they're saying the sale will not affect VIA passenger service. Also, my source says the "Hudson Bay" may get a dome car in January. This is the first time, to my knowledge, that the train to Churchill would feature a dome car. This is a marketing ploy by VIA to appeal to people who want to view the Northern Lights. Sounds like a good idea to me.

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With your 3-year new, renewal or gift subscription to Rail Travel News, you can have a free copy of RTN's "home video", "Rails of California, Vol. One".

This video has some flaws, but it's the only film we'll ever have of the SIERRA 49ER EXPRESS, shot in 1991 a few weeks before this unusual train's discontinuance.

When we receive your remittance of only $69 for 72 issues (a bargain in itself!), plus $3 for shipping costs, we will mail you this unusual video production.

The video is available in VHS size only. It is 33 minutes in duration, in color and natural sound. An especially interesting feature of the film is a variety of wonderful train horns, including Amtrak, Southern Pacific, Santa Fe, SIERRA 49ER EXPRESS, and SP maintenance of way equipment. On the 49ER you'll see the company's own domes and rebuilt bi-level commuter cars as well as leased AMERICAN-EUROPEAN EXPRESS cars.

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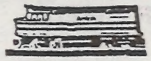

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- SIERRA 49ER EXPRESS
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